## HIS BLUE SERGE SUIT AND OTHER PLAYS

By BELLE MacDIARMID RITCHEY

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BY
BELLE MACDIARMID RITCHEY

BOSTON:
B. J. BRIMMER COMPANY
1924

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His Blue Serge Suit was first produced at the University of Cincinnati under the direction of Frank Byers; also at the MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire, July 28, 1922, under the direction of Olive Mortimer Remington. A Little Home of Their Own was first produced by members of the MacDowell Colony, under the direction of the author.



To

Two Beloved Wearers of

Blue Serge Suits

J. W. R.

and

H. M. R.



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## HIS BLUE SERGE SUIT A Farce in One Act

## MACDOWELL COLONY CAST HIS BLUE SERGE SUIT

Produced under direction of Olive Mortimer Remington
NANCY CORDESDorothy H. Kuhns (playwright)
Howard Cordes Douglas S. Moore (composer)
ICE MANPadraic Colum (poet)
TRASH MAN Giovanni Tonieri (futurist)
JanitorArthur Nevin (composer)
LENOX STARRDu Bose Heyward (poet)

### HIS BLUE SERGE SUIT

## A Farce in One Act

## CHARACTERS.

Howard Cordes.
Nancy, his wife.
Lenox Starr, her brother.
The Janitor.
The Iceman.
The Trashman

## TIME.

The Present, or any time.

### PLACE.

The Cordes Apartment, although it might be your home or mine.

### SCENE.

The apartment is a very modern one, in which every article of furniture has a double entendre but the alarm clock. The bed lets up into the wall or is disguised as a desk. There are all the ingenuities by which a modern apartment owner succeeds in making it look like anything but home.

Two doors at the back of the stage lead respectively to the front and rear entrances of the apartment through a narrow hall. Between these doors is a speaking tube with electric buzzer. A little to the left of the rear entrance door is a dumb waiter.

A door in the Right Wall leads to a closet, or wardrobe dressing room. A large mirror may be in this
door or on the wall near by. A Victrola stands near
the front. Many articles of wearing apparel are
scattered about.

As the curtain rises, a green satin slipper is hurled

across the stage from the closet, followed by other garments in rapid succession. Howard is discovered to be head on in this doorway. Nancy is sitting at the dressing table at the left, pasting damp handkerchiefs on the mirror to dry. She is an attractive person, of any age old enough to be married, but not old enough to have stopped trying to reform the masculine sex.

NANCY. It's the loveliest thing you ever saw, Howard. It has the sweetest pale pink feather—not really pink—just the color of the froth on a raspberry soda, on the left side. No, it must have been on the right side.

She tries the effect with handkerchiefs.

HOWARD (still head on in closet). Huh?

NANCY. And it's faced with georgette-

HOWARD (with first glimmer of attention, half emerging from the closet). Georgette who?

NANCY. Elephant's breath—elephant's breath georgette. It's the newest color. And there's the perkiest little bow of black velvet. It's wired and stands up at the silliest angle.

Howard mumbles unintelligibly in the cupboard, continuing to pitch shoes, ice-cream freezer, stone jugs, flasks, endless junk out on the floor, his wife too engrossed to notice.

It's honey-colored leghorn braid—fine weave—but very durable. Mrs. Uptydite paid eighty-five dollars last week, but this one is marked down. It's only forty dollars now.

HOWARD (emerging with very tousled head). Only forty dollars? What's only forty dollars? That suit cost me sixty-five dollars before the war. Lord knows what I'd have to pay for it now.

- NANCY. Suit, Howard? I'm talking about a hat.
- HOWARD. Hat? Good Lord! She's talking about a hat, a forty dollar hat! No wonder the poor houses are crowded.

Nancy turns around indignantly to argue, and sees the disorderly array on the floor.

NANCY. Howard, what are you doing to that closet? HOWARD. Painting it, my dear.

NANCY. Don't be ridiculous, Howard. Have you lost something?

HOWARD. Not at all, my dear. I'm merely taking an inventory.

NANCY. What are you searching for, Howard?

HOWARD. Nothing so important as a forty dollar hat. Just my best blue serge suit. It's three years old to be sure, but then I can't afford a new suit every time they're marked down.

NANCY. Your blue serge suit? Let me see—wasn't it a little tight?

HOWARD. It was not.

NANCY (vaguely). It must be round somewhere.

HOWARD. "Round somewhere." You couldn't hide a postage stamp in this apartment. (suspiciously.) You didn't let the moths get into it?

NANCY. You said no self-respecting moth would attack it.

HOWARD (with sudden premonition). Nancy, you didn't go and leave that good serge suit in the country?

NANCY. No-o. But you said it was too tight and too warm and too faded, and it never did fit anyhow.

HOWARD. Whew! You must have been aggravating that day!

- NANCY. You said you'd never wear the thing again, and you told me-
- HOWARD. You never went and gave my best blue serge suit to a poor but worthy tramp!
- NANCY. You said the ashman, Howard, truly you did, and you didn't specify worthiness, either.
- HOWARD. My best blue suit—the suit I was counting on for solid comfort all summer. A man's tooth brush isn't safe. You've house-cleaned me out of everything but my reputation.
- NANCY. I thought you'd lose that the last time you wore that old blue suit.
- HOWARD. "Old blue suit!" Will you tell me what's going to take its place, and especially what I'm going to wear this afternoon?

Nancy pokes her head in the closet door, and brings out successively white flannels, Palm Beach suit, etc., etc.

- NANCY. Here's your white flannels, Howard. They are just the thing for a garden party.
- HOWARD. Garden party! That's what you want a forty dollar hat for. Haven't you a tennis racquet or a polo cap, or an infant's rattle I could carry to the Directors' meeting that precedes the garden party, although of course I can't expect you to be interested in anything so unimportant as the business by which your husband earns your daily bread and your forty dollar hats.
- NANCY. Hats? Forty dollar hats? I'm only talking about a forty dollar hat. That's all I ever expect to do. I'll end by buying a frame at the five and ten cent store, and trimming it out of the rag bag as usual.
- HOWARD (continuing). I've got to ask them for an increased expense account, and I can't be convincing unless I'm properly and comfortably dressed.

- NANCY (also continuing). Your Palm Beach suit, Howard?
- HOWARD. How would I look coming out in a Palm Beach suit and the tomato plants all frozen last night?
- NANCY (with enthusiasm). Your gray suit fits you perfectly, and it's just right for this weather.
- HOWARD. Nancy! Have you forgotten the night you left the can of red paint on the landing, and I and it and the gray suit all came down to dinner together?
- NANCY. But, Howard, every single spot came out beautifully.
- HOWARD. About a gallon of turpentine stayed in. Shall I go about the city streets smelling like a blooming long haired artist?
- NANCY (hauling forth another garment). Oh, I'd forgotten this little brown check.
- HOWARD. Little? Did I understand you to say little? I advise you to consult an oculist immediately. I bought that suit on a day when you had goaded me beyond endurance, and the tailor took advantage of my state of mind to unload that plaid on me.
- NANCY (runmaging in the back of the closet). Where's that novelty your grateful client sent you from Idaho? I don't see it.
- HOWARD. Can't you hear it? That client's gratitude was noisy but misplaced. Any jury would convict me on sight in that suit. The last time I wore it the policeman on our own beat stopped are under the lamp post to inquire my business.
- NANCY (exasperated). Howard, I reig e to argue with you when you are in such a contract mood. Why don't you go down and buy a new suit? The old one we worn out anyhow.

- HOWARD. Buy a new suit! Isn't that like the extravagance of a woman! Give away a good suit, and "go buy another." "Nearly worn out," was it? There was a whole summer's wear left in that suit.
- NANCY. You tore the sleeve on a barbed wire fence last summer and swore—you'd never wear the thing again.
- HOWARD. Didn't you defy me to find the place after you'd mended it with that gummy, sticky hold-me-tight stuff you use?

NANCY. And it was darned on the knee.

HOWARD. I'm not too proud to wear a darned suit.

NANCY. Well, what are you going to wear to the garden party?

HOWARD. I see nothing suitable in this array of circus apparel. (hopefully) I can't go to the garden party.

Howard sits comfortably, and opens his newspaper.

Nancy snatches it away from him.

NANCY. Howard Cordes, you've got to go.

HOWARD (resignedly). Have I: But I'm due at the Directors' meeting first. Can't you find that tramp's telephone number and offer him a bonus for the return of the suit? I'll throw in this Idaho novelty.

VOICE (from direction of the back stairway). Ice!

HOWARD. Maybe it was the iceman, Nancy.

He rushes out.

Say, have you got my blue serge suit?

ICEMAN (belligerently). Naw-ner yer diamond sunburst nuther.

Iceman appears in decreay, ice tongs dripping, Howard backing away from him.

HOWARD. No offence, no offence.

ICEMAN. Offence, is it? Shure I ain't no jail-bird.

HOWARD. I beg pardon. I didn't mean-

ICEMAN. Pardon, is it? And why should I be pardoned, when I ain't been committed yet?

HOWARD. I'm sorry-

ICEMAN. Sorry, is it? And shure you'll be sorrier when I'm throo wid you.

Drops ice on the floor, and prepares to roll up his sleeves.

NANCY. Let me explain.

ICEMAN. I always listens to the ladies.

NANCY. My husband-

ICEMAN. That little gink? Shure he's no husband for a fine hussy like you.

He leers admiringly at Nancy.

HOWARD. Get out of here and get quick.

ICEMAN (assuming a nonchalant air). Not till I get me ice tickets. Now what's this row about a suit?

NANCY. My husband has mislaid-

HOWARD. My wife has given away my best blue serge suit.

ICEMAN. Not to me. She ain't favorin' me.

He beckons Howard aside.

Now the trashman, he's good-lookin'.

HOWARD. I'll bet it was the trashman. Where is he?

ICEMAN. In the cellar right now.

HOWARD. I'll call him. (Goes to dumb waiter.) Hi, there!

VOICE. What'je want?

HOWARD. Did my wife give you my best blue serge suit?

VOICE. Shure I can use it.

HOWARD. No, no. I'm not going to give it to you. My wife did.

VOICE. Wife? Not me. I'm Bolshevik.

HOWARD. The man's crazy. I bet he's got my suit.

NANCY. I know I didn't give that suit away.

They argue and protest.

ICEMAN (at dumb waiter). Hi, there, pard. Come on up. There's a fight going on.

Noise of trashman dropping barrels and running up the steps.

NANCY. Howard, do be calm.

HOWARD. Calm? Lake Placid has nothing on me.
But I'm not going to be done out of a good serge suit.

The argument is prolonged till hurried entrance of trashman.

TRASHMAN. Assaultin' her, is he? (He advances toward Howard). (To Nancy). Do yez want the police?

NANCY. No, no-my husband-

TRASHMAN. Him!

ICEMAN (roaring). Yes, him!

HOWARD (with dignity). My wife has given away a valuable suit by mistake. Have you got it?

TRASHMAN (surveying the costume of his trade). Not on me, old top.

ICEMAN. Search me, gink.

HOWARD (badgered). Nancy, which one of them's got it?

NANCY. Howard, I'm sure-

All talk at once. Janitor whistles up the tube. Nancy goes to the tube.

Yes, sir.

She makes frightened signs to Howard, and with her hand over the tube, whispers.

I knew the janitor would hear you.

Yes, sir. Oh, not at all, sir. It really isn't necessary. It's perfectly all right.

She drops the receiver, and comes to the huddled group in front.

He's coming up.

Consternation.

That's the third time this month. It's that tabby below that complains. Oh, Howard we'll have to move.

Even the iceman and trashman look sympathetic. Nancy nervously starts the Victrola which plays, "Brighten the Corner Where You Are."

The janitor appears in the doorway, richly apparelled.

HOWARD. (effusively) How do you do, sir?

He offers a cigar.

JANITOR. Import my own brand.

He flourishes gold banded cigar. Howard meekly returns cheaper brand to his pocket.

NANCY. It's a pleasant day, isn't it?

JANITOR. (eyeing her coolly). What's the row about?

ICEMAN. This gink here-

TRASHMAN. False pretenses, I calls it.

HOWARD. My wife, sir-

NANCY. My husband, sir-

JANITOR. It's the third complaint this month.

ICEMAN. I won't take his guff-

TRASHMAN. He called me up to git a suit-

HOWARD. I ask you, sir, if such impertinence is to be submitted to—

NANCY. Howard!

JANITOP. It's the noise that's being complained of—and the class of visitors you entertain.

He looks at trashman and iceman as if they were insects.

HOWARD. Visitors? Get out of here, both of you.

ICEMAN. Not till I git me ice tickets.

TRASHMAN. Me character's been assailed.

HOWARD. Get out of here.

NANCY. Howard!

The trashman and iceman stand together threatening. Nancy searches frantically in drawers and teapots. Howard turns out his pockets.

JANITOR. Can't have rows like this going on here. Nothing but family rows allowed in the Seraphic Place Apartments.

NANCY. Let me assure you-

JANITOR. There's a party waiting for this flat. Real swells. In Town Topics every Sunday.

NANCY. (in dismay). Howard, we can't move again. Where'll we go? Do something. Give them something. Get rid of them.

HOWARD (offering cigar). Smoke?

ICEMAN. Got sick on one of them things once. It's a pipe for me.

TRASHMAN. I'm a member of the Anti-Tobacco League. Chairman of the Crusade. Don't insult me.

JANITOR. When your friends have gone, I'll see your lease.

NANCY. (weening). Howard, we shan't have a roof over our heads. We'll have to sit on the hard, hard curb stone or sleep in the car. Howard, stop quarreling and do something.

HOWARD. I'm not quarreling. Do something your-self. You've got tact.

NANCY. (rising to the occasion). My good men, my husband and I have a little private business with this gentleman. You'll excuse us, I'm sure.

The iceman and trashman stand pat, winking at each other. Nancy in desperation looks about for argument.

Here, perhaps you can use these.

She hands fur-trimmed overcoat and bath robe to iceman; bathing suit, Pierrot costume and golf sticks to trashman. As they still hesitate, she piles silk hat on trashman's head, gives lace parasol to iceman. She grabs up Paisley shaw' and frathered hat and propels the protesting men to the door.

Give them to your wife.

She is at the end of her endurance, and almost hysterically insists.

Well, give it to your mother-in-law then, if you haven't got a wife.

Howard meanwhile is frantically jamming remnants of his wardrobe back into the closet. Landlord, unmoved. Nancy gathers kersetf together and adopts offensive tactics. She turns airily to the janitor.

There really should be some way of protecting tenants from such outrages. It's quite upset me, just as I was making out my invitation list for the Tea I'm giving next week for Mrs. Sudyer Reesh. You'll pardon me if I continue while you and my husband talk business or politics.

Howard and the junitor look at each other, embarrassed; they make several vain attempts to start conversation.

JANITOR. About that lease now?

HOWARD. Oh, the League now, you favor it?

JANITOR. Can't give no favors.

HOWARD. A few slight reservations now-

JANITOR. Few? There's fifty people got reservations in this building.

HOWARD. But surely you're interested in the rights of our weaker neighbors.

JANITOR. I'm interested in the right kind of neighbors for this building. My wife's cousin—

Nancy who has been signalling to encourage Howard, takes a desperate resolve, and rises sweetly to quell the fray.

NANCY. Pardon me—Mr?—Mr.—I'm not quite sure of the middle initial—Patrick?

JANITOR. Patrick D .-

NANCY. Patrick D .--?

JANITOR. Maloney.

NANCY. Patrick D. Maloney. Thank you. Mrs. Patrick D. Maloney.

She addresses an envelope obviously.

I'm afraid I've had to leave out some of my best friends, but the apartment is so small. I've had to be select. Next Wednesday. I do hope your wife is not engaged, Mr.—Mr.—(looks at envelope) Maloney. I'm giving two teas, one for my friends and one for my neighbors.

During this conversation, Howard is flabbergasted. while Nancy sweetly and tactfully backs the janitor out of the room. When he is gone, she collapses and weeps.

What will that cat below say?

HOWARD. Did you invite her?

NANCY. Of course I invited her. She's my best friend.

HOWARD. Friend or neighbor party?

NANCY. Both. I have to borrow her spoons.

HOWARD (heartlessly and helplessly). Settle your tea fights yourself. But this won't settle what I'm to wear to that Directors' meeting. You've given away my entire wardrobe now. You might have spared me that one blue suit.

NANCY. I tell you I did not give away that suit. But I suppose I've got to find it for you. Howard! Don't you remember? Lenox has a blue serge—just like yours.

HOWARD. Just like mine! Just like mine! The woman jibbers. My deluded brother-in-law buys his clothes from Sears Roebuck.

NANCY. Well, it's blue serge. You and Lenox are exactly the same size. It will fit you beautifully.

HOWARD. Fit! Fit me! A Sears Roebuck suit fit!

Nancy pays no attention to his ravings. She goes competently to the telephone, and takes up receiver. Waits. With hand over receiver, she turns to Howard.

Look between the mattresses, Howard. Perhaps you put it there to press.

Howard does as he is bid, hauls forth light grey trousers with marks of springs strongly emphasized upon them. Nancy jiggles handle.

Happy Valley 2313-X.

Waits. Turns to Howard.

That's the pair you accused me of giving away *last* spring, the one you burned a hole in, hanging them on the chandelier. . . . Hello, Lenox, dear.

Nancy drops receiver.

Howard, a man called me "sweetie."

Howard rushes to the telephone.

HOWARD. What do you mean by insulting my wife? Waits. Jiggles handles. No reply.

Who was it, Nancy?

NANCY. It wasn't Lenox. Of course he's rung off.
You didn't expect him to listen to you?

Nancy takes receiver from Howard. Waits.

Jiggles handle. A long pause.

Will you kindly give me Happy Valley 2313-X? I did not. I distinctly said X.

Waits.

Is that you, Lenox? Lenox, Howard has to have a suit to wear to the Directors' meeting this afternoon.

Lenox' replies are of course inaudible, but they may be inferred from Nancy's repetitions.

"It's customary?" Of course it's customary. Don't try to be funny, Lenox. A blue serge suit. Yes, this afternoon. Blue serge, and his is—he says I gave it away, but I know I didn't. Anyhow we can't find it, and it's nearly time for the meeting, so can you send it right away? . . . Why, the blue serge suit, of course. "You havn't got it?" I didn't say you had, silly. No—no, not Howard's, your own—your Sears Roebuck suit. Yes. Please hurry. Howard's in such a state. No, I will not get off the line. I'm talking to my own brother. Oh, dear, they've cut me off, but he said he'd come right away. . . . Howard, what are you doing?

HOWARD. Trying to find a shirt with a button on.

From some hidden recess Howard has dragged shirts, neckties, collars, etc., and has them scattered all over the room; he stuffs a shirt in the waste paper basket.

NANCY. Howard, that's a perfectly good shirt. Give it to me.

IIOWARD. It's got a regular saw edge neck band, and the sleeves are too long. NANCY. I can trim off the neck band, and put a gusset in the sleeves. Howard Cordes, how many neckties have you got?

HOWARD (uncomfortably). I don't know.

NANCY. I'm going to count them. One-two-three-

HOWARD. That one's no good. It's worn out.

NANCY. Four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten-

HOWARD. You needn't count that purple thing. I wouldn't wear that to a prize fight. I don't know where it ever came from.

NANCY. I do. That was my Christmas gift to you, and you've never worn it. I don't believe you've even paid the bill for it.

Weeps.

HOWARD (hastily). I'm saving it, my dear, for some special occasion. I'll wear it to the garden party.

NANCY. Howard! You can't wear a purple tie with a blue suit!

HOWARD. Why not? Anyhow, I haven't got a blue suit.

NANCY. Because you can't. Eleven-twelve-thirteen-fourteen-fifteen. I don't see why a man can't have a Sunday tie and a week day tie. There must be at least forty ties here, and you never paid less than a dollar apiece for them. Forty dollars' worth of ties that you never wear. That's as much as that love of a hat.

HOWARD. But it's only one hat. If women would be content to have a Sunday hat and a week day hat, but they must have theatre hats, and bridge hats and voting hats and—

Nancy is rescued from this tirade by a knock at the door and a boy delivers a paste board box containing a blue serge suit.

NANCY. How in the world did Lenox manage to get it over here so quickly? Good old Lenox! You can depend on him.

She has been busily untying the box.

You'd better change right away. Then if there are any little alterations, I could pin them up, or something.

Howard looks at her witheringly, takes box and goes into recess behind bed, muttering.

HOWARD. "Pin them up!"

NANCY (still counting neckties). Sixteen-seventeen-eighteen-nineteen-twenty-twenty-one—

HOWARD (from behind bed). Did you say Lenox and I are the same size?

NANCY. Twenty-two, twenty-three-Yes, aren't you?

HOWARD. Might be, by cubic measure. These trousers trail.

NANCY. Pin them up. Twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine—

HOWARD (emerging and trying to examine the fit of the suit in the glass of the closet door, which is also covered with drying handkerchiefs). How do you think I'm going to wear a suit like this? Look at me!

NANCY. Thirty, thirty-one, thirty-two—You look very nice. I think it's fresher and cleaner than your old one.

HOWARD. "Fresher and cleaner!"

He turns and twists and peers around the handker-chiefs.

It's the fit of the thing. Two of me could get into this suit. Lenox is a Muldoon patient.

NANCY. Thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty-five.

HOWARD. It's faded in spots-and it's worn through,

and some darned idiot that doesn't know the difference between a Sears Roebuck and my best tailor-made is wearing my blue serge suit this minute.

Lenox Starr knocks, opens door, and calls.

LENOX. Hello, anybody home?

Lenox walks in without ceremony, attired in a blue serge suit. Nancy and Howard stare. Nancy naturally recovers first.

NANCY. Did you get a new one?

LENOX. New what?

NANCY. Suit. Blue serge suit.

LENOX. What in heck do I want with a new blue serge suit, when I've got this in perfect condition?

NANCY. But Howard is wearing yours.

LENOX. The deuce he is! How can he when I am?

HOWARD. Is that your suit?

LENOX. Whose clothes do you think I'm wearing? The trashman's?

HOWARD. But you can't. I am.

LENOX. Am what?

KOWARD. Lost in this Sears Roebuck sleeping bag of yours.

LENOX. Mine?

HOWARD. Yes, yours. You don't think I'd own a garment like this?

NANCY. Howard! When Lenox was kind enough to lend it to you!

LENOX. The devil I was!

NANCY. Well, didn't you? I telephoned-

I.ENOX. You telephoned and told me to come over right awayNANCY. I didn't say "come." I said "send."

LENOX. Send what?

NANCY. Your blue serge suit, of course, silly.

LENOX. What in thunder do you want with my blue serge suit? You told me particularly to wear it.

NANCY. I did not. I told you to send it right away, and a boy brought it and Howard's got it on.

Lenox looks at Howard critically for the first time.

LENOX. That my suit. I guess not. That's that old tight faded thing I told Howard last spring he ought to give to a rummage sale.

HOWARD. (turns to Nancy). So that's what you did with my best blue serge suit! Gave it to a rummage sale.

LENOX. For the love of Mike, what are you raving about? You've got it on.

HOWARD (still raving). A sixty-five dollar suit, and my wife goes and gives it to a runnage sale!

NANCY. But what have you got on, if Lenox wore his instead of sending it as I told him to?

HOWARD. (twisting around to examine himself). I—don't—know.

LENOX. Any darned fool would know his own suit.

He goes over to Howard.

That's the place you snagged on the barbed wire fence last summer, and swear—I didn't know there were so many cuss words in the English language as you used that day.

NANCY. And I darned it, and put that sticky, gummy, hold-me-tight stuff behind it, until you can't find the place.

Lenox turns Howard's pocket inside out.

- LENOX. Gee! Sokum and Robbe! Highest priced tailors in town.
- NANCY. (innocently). More expensive than your tailors, Sears Roebuck, Lenox?

Howard tries hard to be assertive, while Lenox and Nancy examine him in detail, finding and commenting on familiar spots in the landscape.

- HOWARD. But where—how did you get it back from wherever you gave it to?
- NANCY. I told you I never gave that suit away.
- HOWARD (struggling for last remnant of self-respect).

  But it came in a box just now—

All three rush for the box. Nuncy gets it first and reads.

- NANCY. Prompt Service Dry Cleaning Company.
- LENOX. That's where I'll send my next suit to be cleaned. It isn't six months since you took that suit there.
- HOWARD (meekly, with a glimmer of recognition of impending doom). I took it?
- LENOX. You took it yourself. I happened to be with you, old man.
- NANCY. (The day of retribution is in her voice, and she waxes more and more eloquent as she proceeds).

And he's been accusing me of giving it away, and he rowed with the ashman and the trashman, and that cat down stairs complained and the janitor came up, and he almost put us out, and I had to invite his wife to my tea, and she'll come, and that feline too, and what will Mrs. Suyden Reesh say?

She weeps on Lenox' shoulder. Howard, badgered, looks from one to the other, slowly surveys the suit, tries to look in the glass through the handkerchiefs,

pulls them off, throws them on the floor. Lenox, patting Nancy's back, winks at his brother-in-law over her shoulder.

LENOX. Drinks are on you, old man.

Howard stands petrified for a moment, then a sudden inspiration seizes him.. He rushes to the telephone and calls a number with the usual delays.

HOWARD. Dub. 4411 Mme. Millineur. Yes, give me the Madame herself.

Nancy's head is lifted, she jumps up and down, kisses Lenox, and as Howard struggles with the telephone, she picks up the green satin slipper, taps Lenox, who is watching Howard, on the shoulder, and the corrections are relayed from Nancy through Lenox to Howard.

HOWARD. My wife was looking at a hat, a forty dollar hat (groans) in your shop. Oui-oui. Meesis Cordes, Meesis Howard Cordes. Send it up right away oui-oui-quickly-vitement beaucoup haste—tooty sweety. Oui-oui. Plymouth rock tape.

The green slipper prompts Lenox.

LENOX. Leghorn braid.

HOWARD. Leghorn braid will do. Sugar colored with a saucy bow. It's trimmed with blanchette, Blanchette a woman's name.

The green slipper does its duty.

LENOX. Georgette.

HOWARD. Georgette-georgette seersucker.

LENOX. (prompted as before) Crêpe.

HOWARD. Crêpe. Forty dollars marked up from thirty-nine ninety-nine.

Howard turns from the telephone with the air of a generous husband, well-satisfied with himself, inviting

Nancy to be grateful. Nancy dances toward him; in the middle of the room she pauses to remark cheerfully.

NANCY. I'll have to have a new dress to go with it, Howard, dear.

Howard sinks into an arm chair. Lenox slaps his knee and turns away, convulsed. Nancy stands in the middle of the room, mistress of herself and of the situation.

CURTAIN

# A LITTLE HOME OF THEIR OWN A Comedy in One Act

### MACDOWELL COLONY CAST

Produced under the direction of the author.

## A LITTLE HOME OF THEIR OWN

#### A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

James Smith.......Prof. Rollo Walter Brown (writer)

NELL Smith, his wife. Belle MacDiarmid Ritchey (playwright)

HERVEY WILTON..... Theodore Spicer-Simson (sculptor)

Rose Wilton, his wife. Margaret Spicer-Simson (painter)

ANNE, the maid.....Mary Elizabeth Ritchey (architect)

GEORGE RAWLINS.....C. E. Scoggins (writer)

# A LITTLE HOME OF THEIR OWN

A Comedy in One Act

## CHARACTERS.

James Smith.

Nell Smith, his wife.

Hervey Wilton.

Rose Wilton, his wife.

Annie, the maid.

George Rawlins.

#### TIME.

The Present, just before dinner of a chilly evening.

## PLACE.

The small suburban home of the James Smiths.

#### SCENE.

The combination living room and dining room of the James Smiths is the usual room of a young couple who have been married long enough for their first house furnishings to have grown a little shabby, and not long enough to be able to discard or make a harmonious re-adjustment of the wedding presents and the things they bought "to use until they could afford what they really wanted".

In the Back Wall, there is a door opening immediately into the kitchen, and beside it a china closet which has sliding doors on both the kitchen and dining room sides.

In the Left Wall, there is a bay window. In the Right Wall, the front entrance door, and a stairway, a few steps of which are in the living room. A couch and comfortable chairs toward the front presuppose a fireplace on the audience side of the room.

When the curtain rises, Nell, in a bungalow apron over her shabby evening gown, is putting the finishing touches to a table set for four. She picks up a glass, looks at it critically, polishes it with her apron; straightens a picture on the wall, puts a wad of paper under the leg of the table, moves a chair to cover a worn place in the rug, or any other less obvious manoeuvre of a distraught hostess, expecting guests before whom she hopes to shine.

There is the sound of a latch-key, and James Smith enters jovially, unaware that joviality is not his cue. His wife does not turn. He drops his suit case and holds out his arms.

JAMES. Hello, Old Girl. I'm back.

NELL. (her lips forming a thin line). So I perceive. His extended arms drop as he walks toward his wife, who coldly turns her cheek to receive his wary peck.

JAMES. Where's the kid?

NELL. In bed.

JAMES. In bed? It's hardly dark. What's he been up to?

NELL. Nothing. I couldn't stand him underfoot, when I had everything to do.

JAMES. Has Annie left?

NELL. Not yet. But she's only got one pair of hands. She's had to do up the best napkins, shine the silver (She picks up a knife, and adds, as she changes its place at the table) where there's any silver left on it, take care of Jim-Bob while I made the salad and dessert—

She is going on indefinitely. James sees the table set for four.

JAMES. Hello, company to-night?

NELL. Of course. It's wash day.

JAMES. (his joviality beginning to show signs of wear)
What did you invite them for, then?

NELL. I didn't. They said you did. They're your friends not mine.

JAMES. What are you talking about?

NELL. The Hervey Wiltons. They telephoned from some hotel in town and said they were accepting your standing invitation to take pot luck with us, and I've been slaving ever since.

JAMES. Old Wilt? What's he doing at a hotel when we've got a little home of our own? (suddenly jovial again) I haven't seen old Wilt for six years. It'll take an all night chin to catch up.

James is approaching the telephone when his wife grabs his arm.

NELL. He's married.

JAMES. Well so are we, aren't we?

NEI.L. Very much married. Reduced to complete domesticity.

JAMES. (blunderingly) What's the matter, Old Girl? NELL. I wish you wouldn't call me "Old Girl," and don't you dare invite them to stay all night.

JAMES. But there's no train in after ten thirty.

NELL. Ten-thirty! Heavens! They're coming to dinner at seven; they'll be bored to death before nine.

JAMES. Bored? Old Wilt and me?

NELL. Oh, I suppose you could smoke your old black pipes and swap yarns till morning.

JAMES. But Old Girl—but Nell. You never used to mind Wilt. He's been here dozens of times.

NELL. His wife hasn't.

- JAMES. But I thought women could talk about patterns and babies and cooks and the prices of things-
- NELL (witheringly). Oh, yes, I can talk about patterns and babies and cooks and the prices of things.

  It's all I can talk about now.
- JAMES. (uneasily) What do you mean, Old Girl? I don't understand you.
- NELL. Of course you don't. You never have.
- JAMES (stupidly). What's the matter, Old Girl-Nell?
- NELL. Oh, nothing, nothing at all. I'm a wife and a mother, and I must "live happily ever after."
- JAMES. But, Old Girl—but Nell, don't you love me and the kids?
- NELL. Of course I love you. You don't suppose I wear these clothes from choice?
- JAMES (fatuously moving to his doom). Why, you're all dolled up, aren't you? You look mighty nice to me, Old—Nell.
- NELL. You're the only person who thinks so then. This dress is five years old.
- JAMES (on the defensive). So is my suit. You didn't marry a rich man, Nell.
- NELL. (a little ashamed) That's no reason why we should flaunt our rags and tatters.
- JAMES. (hurt) Rags and tatters, Nell?
- NELL. Oh, there's no use trying to explain to a man. But I'll never forgive you if you ask them to stay all night in that awful guest room.
- JAMES. (belligerently) What's the matter with our spare room?
- NELL. Everything. The plaster's cracked; the bed's so hard you have to get up in the middle of the night to rest your back, and there's every kind of awful fur-

niture in it from a brass bed to a golden oak desk—ugh! And that woman's just come from being presented at court.

JAMES. (sulkily) I don't care. Old Wilt wouldn't marry any woman who hadn't sense enough to take us as we are.

NELL. It isn't as we are. It's as being poor makes us look. What I am is a woman who loves music and books, old mahogany and candle glow, dainty china and silver, deft service and intelligent conversation. What I look like, is a household drudge who doesn't know whether Botticelli is a cheese or a wine and thinks Keats are a fish. That woman will patronize me.

JAMES. There, there, Old—Nell.

NELL (hysterically). Don't "there, there," me. I know just how it will be. Annie will rattle the pots and pans. She'll be in such a hurry to get to the movies. Her beau's going to help and he'll guffaw in the kitchen. I'll try to look unconcerned, and Jim-Bob will wake up in the middle of dinner and howl, and I'll have to go up-stairs.

JAMES. Can't Annie bring him down? He looks so cute in his pajamas.

NELL. (scornfully) I'm trying to have a dinner party, not a nursery supper, though why in Heaven's name I should make the effort with nothing to do with, and a flighty maid--

JAMES. Annie's neat and willing.

NELL. Oh, she's neat and willing enough. I could teach her, but she's going to get married, God knows why.

JAMES. I suppose she loves him.

NELL. I suppose she does (bitterly).

The door bell prevents this scene from degenerating

into personal recrimination on both sides.

James starts to the door, but is again restrained by Nell.

Scuttle up-stairs and get dressed.

George Rawlins enters from the kitchen, carrying aloft a heavy tray of glasses which he proceeds to place on the table. James stares.

JAMES. L'amour de Mike (meek)! What's that? By Jove! It's George!

George grins.

NELL. Don't for Heaven's sake call him George. His name is Rawlins.

George, embarrassed, ducks for the kitchen. James grins sympathetically.

JAMES. Where'd he get the clothes?

NELL. Your old ones. The Hervey Wiltons will see that we at least know how a butler ought to look.

JAMES. Good! That lets me out.

NELL. It does not. Your new Tuxedo came. The box is on your bed. Thank goodness you had to have it for that dinner.

JAMES. (suddenly serious and firm) Nell, I won't have any such flummery. We can't afford a butler, and I won't have you pretending that we can. I'm not going to dress up for old Wilt.

NELL. You are for his rich wife.

The bell rings again. James starts for the door, but is hauled back.

NELL. Scoot!

James gives up and starts for the stairway.

Why doesn't Annie go to the door?

Nell hurries to the kitchen, calling impatiently, "Annie"!

Annie appears with floury hands upheld.

ANNIE. I can't go. I'm making biscuits. Let George do it.

The bell rings for the third time.

NELL. Somebody do it quick.

George, awkward, raw-boned, red-faced, in a dress suit painfully too small for him, is pushed out of the kitchen door with marks of Annie's floury hands upon his back, looking more like a stevedore than a butler. He throws open the door, and Mr. and Mrs. Hervey Wilton enter. Mr. Wilton is in a business suit.

GEORGE. (with a flourish) Ladies up-stairs. Gents to the right.

Nell comes forward from the kitchen, where she has been giving some final instructions to Annie, throwing her apron behind her as she enters. She welcomes her guests effusively.

NELL. So glad to see you! How good of you to come, when you must be full of engagements! Rawlins, take Mr. Wilton's coat and stick. Will you come up-stairs with me, Mrs. Wilton? Our menage is very simple. Mr. Smith has just come in, and is dressing. Amuse yourself in the den, Mr. Wilton, Mr. Smith will be down soon.

Mrs. Wilton murmurs polite acquiescence, and the two ladies ascend the stairs in vacuous conversation.

HERVEY (looking after them). "Mr. Wilton!" "Mr. Smith!" "Our ménage is very simple!"

He observes George, still holding his hat and stick. Put 'em in there. That's where I used to keep them before I got a wife and old Jim acquired a—butler.

They look at each other as man to man for a moment. George hangs up the hat and stick and retires to the

kitchen. Hervey goes slowly into the den under the stairway.

JAMES (in a sibilant whisper from the top of the stairs).

Nell! Oh, Nell! I say, Nell!

He comes cautiously down to the landing in a very sketchy costume.

Nell! I say, Old Girl!

George enters with service plates for the table. Jim catches sight of him and frantically beckens. George remains oblivious, absorbed in his task. Jim descends another step.

Hi, there, George! I got to have my suit.

GEORGE. You sure need it, Mr. Smith. You're welcome to it. The missus made me get into it, and I'm afraid I'll pop any minute.

JAMES. Well, you can stop breathing while you get out of it quick. That box on the bed had my white flannels from the cleaner's. Where's your own clothes?

GEORGE. Up in the nursery. The missus told me to change there.

JAMES. Come on, then.

The two men scurry up the stairs, as Annie calls from the kitchen.

ANNIE. Hurry, George!

The women descend the stairs chatting, and Hervey enters from the den.

A howl is heard from the nursery, and a hustling around with banging doors.

Nell tries to look as if there were a nurse maid to attend to it, but grows more and more distrait as the sounds of woe increase in volume.

NELL. Will you excuse me for a moment, please? It is difficult to get experienced maids in our out-of-the-way

suburb. I'll see if I can reduce the nursery to quiet.

She runs up stairs. The Hervey-Wiltons, left alone, have little to say to each other. Hervey is uneasy, Rose amused.

HERVEY. Nice little home-like place, eh, Rose?

ROSE. Very home like.

HERVEY (trying again). Nice little wife Jim's got, isn't she?

ROSE. She may have been once. She's kitchen-minded now—in spite of the —butler(?)

Rose has risen and is looking at a lovely portrait of Nell in her wedding dress.

HERVEY. What do you mean?

ROSE. She must have been a gay young thing. Look at her now. All she thinks about is her husband and children. That's what marriage has done for her.

HERVEY. There might be worse things to think about.

ROSE. I presume you mean something unpleasant by that remark.

HERVEY (decisively). Rose—we might as well settle this thing right now.

ROSE (impertinently). Yes?

HERVEY (bracing himself). Being here in Jim's comfortable little place has made me determined to have a home of my own.

ROSE. It's had precisely the opposite effect on me.

HERVEY (surprised). Just think of the comfort of coming home to a den like that, putting on your slippers, filling your pipe—

ROSE. I don't smoke a pipe.

HERVEY. But you'd have—you'd have—why you'd—you'd be here.

- ROSE. Precisely. I'd be here. I'd stay here, while you came and went and did things and saw things. I'd be getting old and ugly and stupid and—
- HERVEY. You'll always be beautiful to me, Rose.
- ROSE. So long as I wore clothes like these, perhaps, but when I got shabby like Nell.
- HERVEY. Nell looks all right to me.
- ROSE (annihilating him with a glance). And they say women dress to please the men. That evening dress must have been in her trousseau, and she hasn't had a new one since.
- HERVEY. (stubbornly). I don't care. She looks nice.
- ROSE. And clean. That's what they used to tell me when I was little and had to wear faded shabby things.
- HERVEY. Oh, chuck the clothes! I want a real home like this and by heck! I'm going to have it.
- ROSE. Like this! It's shoddy every bit of it. There isn't anything real about it.
- HERVEY. Except a real woman.
- ROSE. Real! She's the shoddiest thing in the house, with her make believe "butler" and her "inefficient" servants. She's lucky if she has a maid of all work.
- HERVEY. (helplessly). She has her children.
- ROSE. And she's a perfect slave to them. She puts a bold face on it, but for all her "so glad to see you" "it's so good of you to come," she wishes she were in Jericho and she could take off her stays, soak her feet in mustard water and go to bed.
- HERVEY. Nell never goes to any trouble for company.
- ROSE. Oh, doesn't she! She's worn to a frazzle.

  There's a dust cloth on the round of that chair and I slipped on a cake of soap on the landing. She probably dropped it when she had to fly to the kitchen to keep

the dessert from burning, or put the salad on ice.

George Rawlins, in a checked suit, brilliant tie, and yellow shoes, descends the stairs while their backs are turned, walks leisurely to the kitchen, escaping notice by the simple expedient of not trying to avoid it.

ROSE. She's cut her finger and burned her arm, snapped at the children and been a shrew to her husband.

Nell has re-appeared on the landing and has heard the last of this speech. She pulls her sleeve down to be sure the burn is covered, puts her cut finger in her mouth. She stands quietly and thoughtfully a moment gathering up her forces.

All her airs can't fool me. I was poor a long time myself. I ought to have known better than to let you drag me out here on a man's invitation, to see "how happy Jim and Nell are in a little home of their own." I was fool enough to think it might be true.

Before Hervey can reply, James joins his wife on the landing and they descend together. The men greet each other with joy and try to cover a certain felt chilliness in the air with jovial introductions.

JAMES. You girls get busy and get acquainted. Old Wilt and I have met before.

George re-appears from the kitchen to announce "Dinner is served," in a stage whisper. Nell does not hear him. He tries again "Dinner's ready," and finally in stentorian tones. "Say, Mis' Smith, ain't you going to eat?"

Nell does not see him immediately, but as she turns to place her guests, she is petrified with horror. She manages to manoeuver George back into the kitchen, while Hervey and Jim fall on each other's necks in rude mirth.

They take their scats, Nell making signs to George

in the doorway with the soup.

NELL. Have Annie bring in the soup, Rawlins.

GEORGE. I got it right here, ma'am.

JAMES (avoiding his wife's eye). Oh, come along, George, bring us whatever you've got.

George advances with the soup borne aloft as he has seen waiters in cheap restaurants do. He keeps a wary eye on Nell, who manages to convey to him the intelligence that his presence is not desired. He nods and goes out. After an interminable wait, filled with inane conversation, Annie appears; there is flour on the sleeve of her black dress. Nell tries furtively to brush it off. Annie is visibly nervous, and spills Nell's plate of untasted soup.

The dinner drags its weary length, but Nell's attempts to retrieve it are not seconded. The men. absorbed in each other, pay no attention to the women. Annie is unsteady. She forgets to close the door into the kitchen, and at intervals throughout the dinner. George's voice may be heard in protest or expostulation. When the door is closed, on whispered instructions from Nell, the pantry slide is opened by George, and vice versa, George may occasionally be seen, noisily stacking dishes, whipping cream, assisting in various ways. Once he grabs Annie around the waist, and gives her a resounding smack, as she comes out with a heavy tray of dishes. which he then tenderly takes from her. Nell tries to cover the noise and kitchen conversation with irrelevant chatter. Rose is cool and amused. It is one of those hopeless social occasions which occur in the most hospitable households, when the hostess has nothing to say, and says it continuously.

George has been mashing potatoes during the whole of one of Annie's long periods of waiting in the din-

ing room. As she returns to the kitchen, he expresses his sense of injury.

GEORGE. Gee, Annie, these spuds will be black and blue if I hit 'em again.

ANNIE. Sh-h. Dish 'em up.

Annie returns to the dining room, as James calls.

JAMES. Has the butter given out, Annie?

ANNIE (looks at Mrs. Smith, who is now apathetic).

Mrs Smith took it off (nervously). Butter is not served with dinner, sir.

Nell has given up her valiant attempt to keep up the conversation and now sits listless, too exhausted to care. Her resentment at Rose's coolness has grown steadily. Now Rose's attempt to hide her amusement is the last straw and Nell retaliates.

NELL. Bring Mr. Smith butter, if he wishes it, Annie.
Doubtless Mr. Wilton is used to butter with his dinner also.

JAMES (hastily, recognizing a danger signal). I suppose you'll be settling down now, Wilt, after your long honeymoon, although it couldn't have seemed long to you.

ROSE. No?

JAMES. Nell and I had to be content with two weeks.

ROSE. It was hardly worth while to cross for that, was it?

JAMES. Cross?

Nell, at the end of her string, suddenly ceases to pretend and puts on the dignity of honestu.

NELL. Oh, we weren't so ambitious as that. We went to Niagara.

ROSE. How interesting!

NELL. Yes, wasn't it? We were so thrilled with excitement.

- ROSE. Indeed!
- NELL. Traveling was tame, though, to the excitement of trying to keep house. I was the most ignorant little fool.
- JAMES (slightly dazed, but trained to follow her lead)
  You were a dead game little sport.
- NELL. I couldn't cook. I couldn't sew. I was the most useless expense.
- JAMES. Hear! Hear! You were the prettiest, sweetest-
- NELL. Jim couldn't afford me. He was making only twenty dollars a week and I couldn't do accounts.
- JAMES. She never complained.
- NELL. Jim had to help wash the dishes. And the messes he had to eat!
- JAMES. She was the pluckiest little thing. She kept on trying till she's the best little housekeeper in town.
- NELL. I'm not. I'll always be shiftless, and I'm a fusser. Jim had a lot to put up with.
- JAMES (loyally). I guess not more than you have. I'm untidy and I'm always bringing home unexpected company—
- NELL (quickly). In fact, we're the average, respectable happily married couple, putting up with each other's faults—and talking altogether too much about ourselves.
- ROSE (to prevent herself from yielding to emotion).

  How very romantic it all sounds!
- HERVEY (hotly). It is romantic. A man and his wife working together, strungling together and putting up with each other's faults is a darned sight more romantic than a man's trailing around Europe on his wife's money, kowtowing to royalry, and hobnobbing with a lot of expatriates or worse.

- ROSE. Hervey wants to go into business and sit with his feet on a mahogany desk, and a cigar in his mouth until he forgets the amenities that make life endurable.
- HERVEY. It's better than forgetting what an honest day's work is.
- ROSE (to Jim). Hervey's determined to drag me out to that Middle West, middle class town where he used to have a job.
- JAMES (floundering). A man's got to have a job.
- ROSE (irritatingly cool). I fail to see the necessity.

  Why should Hervey grind at making money that we don't need?
- NELL. Do you prefer to reduce your husband to a mere appendage?
- ROSE (petulantly). Well, I'm not going.
- HERVEY (stung by the word "appendage"). Well, I am.

They glare at each other, while Jim and Nell avert their eyes in embarrassment. The heavy silence is broken by the crash of china. The kitchen door and pantry slides are now ALL open, and no one pretends not to listen.

- ANNIE. Oh, dear, that comes of hurrying so fast. I'd rather not go to the movies at all. I'm that nervous.
- GEORGE. You're tired out. That's what's the matter with you. Marry me, Annie darlint, and let me take you out of other folks' kitchens. You won't have to work so hard when you are missus in a little home of your own.
- ANNIE (turning on him). Don't you fool yourself, George Rawlins. I'll have to work a heap sight harder, getting up at five to get you off to work, and I won't have no nice kitchen like this to do it in either. Me days off regular and me wages every Saturday night

with no one to spend them on but meself. The laundry sent out, and the heavy cleaning done. Never having to count the cost of what I ate. A room to meself and me time me own when me work's done. I guess I know when I'm well off.

- GEORGE. Your head's turned by living soft, and listening to the talk of them half-naked dolled up women in there.
- ANNIE. Yes, I been listening to them quarreling with them nice men just because they're tired of never being able to do what they please. I'm fond of me independence.
- GEORGE. Is it throwing me down you are, then, Annie?

ANNIE (sulkily). What will I get out of marrying you, but hard work and trouble like all the other women?

JAMES. Aren't we going to have coffee, Nell?

NELL. In the drawing room later, Jim.

JAMES. Oh, Nell, Old Girl, I've had a heavy trip. Can't I have mine now? You girls can take your thimblefuls into the parlor.

Nell laughs and puts her foot on the buzzer, after the usual difficulty in finding it.

GEORGE. Run along and take 'em their food that they're too feeble to reach for themselves. I'll trot along and hunt up some nice girl that's decent enough to want a little home and kids of her own.

Annie is taken back, but is too proud to give in.

ANNIE. Oh, very well, Mr. Rawlins.

She dashes away the tears that start, and goes into the dining room, tossing her head.

NELL. Bring Mr. Smith a large cup of coffee, Annie. Mr. Wilton probably prefers his now, also.

Rose and Hervey are silent; Nell and her husband

smile at each other in renewed understanding.

Annie enters bearing two large cups of coffee. She has forgotten her tray. She drops one, spilling the hot coffee on her wrist. At the same time she twists her ankle and falls to the floor, shricking, "George!"

George rushes in, hat on the back of his head. The others start up, but George reaches Annie first.

GEORGE. Annie, darlint, are you hurt bad?

She promptly faints in George's arms.

NELL. Carry her to the couch, George. Jim, telephone for the Doctor. Bring some cold water from the kitchen, Rose, and some soda. She's scalded her arm. Hervey, open a window.

They hover over Annie in great confusion. George repeats over and over,

GEORGE. Annie, Annie, darlint. Don't die, Annie. Don't go and leave me, Annie. Annie, darlint, I never meant a word of it.

Jim is struggling with the telephone.

JAMES. "Service discontinued." Well, I'll be darned.

Nell, what did you do with that ten dollars I gave you last week? You didn't pay the telephone bill, and "service is discontinued." Pretty mess!

Rose spills water and is helpless generally.

GEORGE. She was an honest Irish girl, and she loved me, till ye put notions in her head. Look at them fool slippers on her hard working little feet. Oh, Annie darlint, speak to me. Don't be after leavin' me. Annie opens her eyes slowly.

ANNIE. George, darlint, don't be mad wid me.

James gives up his struggle at the telephone where
he has been stating the urgency of his call. Rose

walks over to the window, Hervey looking after her with hungry, adoring eyes.

A howl is heard from the nursery above. Nell, seeing that Annie is coming to, runs up the stairs. George and Annie are oblivious to anybody but each other.

GEORGE (suddenly relieved and therefore dictatorial, squares himself). You'll marry me tomorrow, Annie.

ANNIE. Whatever made ye think I wouldn't, George darlint?

GEORGE (manfully). I can't give you no more than I could before. I ain't smart like you, Annie. I'll work hard for you. I'll be good to you, me girl. But we'll always be poor, Annie.

Annie, with her arms around George's neck, raises herself to a sitting position and clings to George who is kneeling by her couch.

ANNIE. I ain't looking for a soft job no more. I ain't afraid of wurrk, but I ain't fooling meself. When the children are thick under foot, and the sipes leak, and there's got to be a new stove, and it's Easter time, and I'm wearing me shabby winter clothes, I ain't saying that maybe I wen't git so my for mer at. I'll be cross and ugly. We'll have hard ver is the re-but I got to do it, even if you beat me, because—you're me man.

James comes up behind the couch.

JAMES. Bully for you, Annie. That's the line of talk.

George and Annie become conscious of spectators.

George stumbles to his feet, still holding Annie, who hides her face on his shoulder. Hose turns away from the window, where she has been playing with the cord of the curtain. Her eyes are starry. The grim lines about Hervey's mouth retax, as she turns to him.

ROSE. Don't let me be a fool, Hervey. Make me go with you—to the end of the world.

Hervey's arms close around her. Nell appears on the landing. James springs to meet her, and enfolds her in a huge embrace.

CURTAIN

# THE PORTRAIT OF YOLANDE A Fragrant Memory

#### THE PORTRAIT OF YOLANDE

## A Fragrant Memory

#### CHARACTERS.

Tolles Howard, a painter.

Raymond Adams, an art student.

Yolande Therrett, a singer, who comes a far journey. Richard Rafe, a composer.

#### TIME.

As it grows dusk, in the late fall.

#### PLACE.

The studio of Tolles Howard.

#### SCENE.

In the Back Wall there is a door and a window, the window looking out over the house tops, the door opening on a landing which obviously leads to the stairway. In the Right Wall there is a fire-place with couch, chairs, etc. At the Left there is an alcove. Two steps leading to this recess, in which is the model's stand, project into the room, but the stand itself is not visible. The painter's north light is also invisible. There are pictures along the wall, many with the backs of the canvas out, also the usual furnishings of a hard working artist.

Tolles Howard is seated at his easel, although the afternoon shadows are lengthening. An occasional snowflake falls owtside, and the sunlight is almost gone. The fire on the hearth has burned to gray ashes, just a few sparks showing. It is a cheerless scene, except for the painting on the easel. The canvas has a background of trees, deep woods.

Against a great pine a woman is leaning, a slender dryad figure in green and white draperies, hands loosely clasped, her face up-lifted, as though listening for a loved voice.

Raymond Adams enters. Howard, absorbed, greets him casually.

- ADAMS. Just stopped in to see if you found everything ship-shape in the studio, Mr. Howard. It was ripping of you to let me use it all summer. I don't know how to thank you.
- HOWARD. Don't try! Much obliged to you for keeping the dirt and the moths out. It was more cheerful to come back to.
- ADAMS. I learned a lot, sir, from the canvasses you left in the studio—

He turns and sees the canvas on the easel, looks at it a long time, while Howard watches him.

It must be heaven, Mr. Howard, to be able to paint like that.

HOWARD. You like it?

ADAMS (impetuously). I'd work and starve and give up everything to paint a picture like that. It's been great, living with your work, but this is different—when it's finished, it will live. She—she—you're so sure. She—she—it's wonderful when a woman loves you like that.

HOWARD (startled). What do you mean?

ADAMS (boyishly). The way she looks at you, sir.
You know she's just waiting for you to come down the
path, waiting, and listening, and loving. She makes
you believe—

HOWARD. Believe?

ADAMS (recovering himself). I'm talking nonsense,

- sir, but that girl—Art's the real thing, the thing that lasts. Love is an episode. An artist must not let it interfere with his work—his mission.
- HOWARD (quietly). You are talking nonsense, Adams. (after a pause). Is there, perhaps, a little girl back home, who looks at you—like that?
- ADAMS (blushing, stammering, trying to look like a man of the world, and succeeding only in looking lovelorn and homesick). But an artist must keep himself free from—

## HOWARD. Free from ?

ADAMS (embarrassed and stumbling). From thinking about—from wanting—from longing—

#### He almost breaks down.

- HOWARD. You ungrateful cub! If there's a girl in the world whom you can make look at you—like that, crawl on your hands and knees to her and beg her to—
- ADAMS (wavering). But I haven't the right to ask her to wait so long.
- HOWARD. You haven't the right not to ask her. Ask her to wait, to work, to starve with you, if she loves you, but don't let ice congeal about your heart, and boast of being an artist, and free (bitterly), free!
- ADAMS (fatuously). She's such a pretty girl. She's so different. Her eyes are big and wide, and her hair won't stay put, and her hands—when she's waiting, she clasps them just that way, and her voice, and the way the corners of her mouth turn up, and—
- HOWARD. Go to her, Adams, and drool to her. She'll like it.
- ADAMS (more fatuously). It's wonderful, sir, the way women are. I didn't know about you, sir. You used to think it was weakness, but it shows even in your

painting. You used to think out how to do things, now you feel it. I beg your pardon, sir. It's presumptuous of me to try to talk about your work. I can't express it, but all summer, I'd look at your marvelous line and color and form, and know that if I worked and worked I never could do it, but this, sir, somehow, it makes you feel that if you live, and try to understand, and help, perhaps just for a moment, sometime, you'll see, and put it on canvas for unseeing eyes, and if you do it just once, it's worth—I hope you'll be as happy as I am, sir.

HOWARD (startled). You blithering idiot, what are you driving at?

ADAMS. The portrait, sir. It's a real girl, and it's different. She looks—she looks at you—like that.

There is silence for a moment, both men absorbed in the portrait.

HOWARD. Not at me, lad. She is Richard Rafe's promised wife. It is for Richard she waits—for Richard she looks like that. She asked me to paint the portrait for her wedding gift to Richard. Oh, lad, you're young. You love and are loved. What do a few pictures matter, when you come to face the long, barren years?

## ADAMS. Barren years?

HOWARD (bitterly). Fool that I was, I rejoiced like you in being free. I rejoiced that love had not laid its numbing hand upon my life. But I had not seen Yolande then, nor heard her sing. Richard sent her to me, and the golden summer wove its enchantment and I knew no fear, for Richard is my friend. Friendship I understood, and trusted to its strength. The golden spell that was being woven about me, I did not know. Its power I had never tested. I can paint—yes. But it is only on canvas that I can call forth the love-light in a woman's eyes—for another—the radiant, waiting look.

But it is Richard Rafe who will come down the woodland path to claim Yolande. He will open the old house that has been closed so long. It will echo with love and laughter and the sound of children's voices, but its doors will be closed to me forever, for Richard is my friend, and God help me, I love Yolande.

Howard has forgotten Adams completely. He seats himself at the easel and bows his head in his hands. The boy stands, awed and wondering. It is very still. Howard raises his head, takes up his brushes, and speaks with frequent pauses, as he makes one or two vain attempts to paint.

HOWARD. It's no use. I can see the pines. I can smell the balsam. But I cannot remember her eyes. Her eyes are lost, Yolande's eyes.

He falls brooding, looking intently at the canvas. He puts in one or two strokes vigorously, then lapses once more into revery. Adams goes quietly out, unnoticed.

If I could paint her eyes, perhaps I could forget. But the love-light in her eyes was for Richard. It was the sound of Richard's voice for which she listened. It was never for me that she sang as she did in the enchanted woodland. Yolande's face—

He gives up in despair, walks to the window, looks out where the snow-flakes are falling increasingly. How she hated the cold and the dark! Uch!

He turns away from the window and tries to stir the dying embers of his fire to catch the half-burned log. Sunlight and warmth! She loved them so.

He returns to the canvas, and sits down before it. It's the sunlight on her face I cannot paint. She always stood in the sunlight. He tries again. His head drops into his hands. He sits motionless.

Yolande! Yolande! How can I face the cold and barren years without you and the sunlight on your face!

The room has been growing darker, and in the shadowy dusk, an ethereal figure glides softly into the room and pauses for a moment on the steps leading to the model's stand. A soft glow falls on the easel. The air is filled with the unmistakable odor of balsam, pungent, sleep-inviting. Yolande, clad in white and green draperies, brings with her a breath from the forest. The half burned log bursts into flame. Howard raises his head, half-arises, dazed.

# The sunlight!

He sees Yolande, and takes a step toward her.

# Yolande! I did not see you come in!

Yolande, pauses for an imperceptible moment on the steps, in the attitude of the portrait, then passes on to the model's stand, out of sight. In a voice of thrilling sweetness, she speaks.

## YOLAND. Richard.

HOWARD. Richard! I must not forget that it is for Richard she has come.

The artist in him prevails.

## Don't move!

He paints furiously, and as he paints, the memory of Richard is forgotten. He talks in broken sentences, partly to himself, partly to Yolande, with frequent pauses.

It was the sunlight that was lacking How could I paint you on a gray da,? There were no gray days in the woodland, were there, Yolande? Do you remember

the sunlight flickering through the beech trees on the hill? And the pine needles in the woods? We tried to measure their depth and couldn't. The gray moss. And the saucy squirrels, Yolande. They scurried when they saw me, but they blocked your path and scolded you. Do you remember the trail we blazed through the hollow, and the bog we fell into? I took that trail again. Yolande. The autumn leaves had covered our path, and the bog is dry; the white blazes on the trees are growing grav, but I found it. I found the spring and the ferns that covered the rock. It was dark and cold beside the pool. No sunlight came through the pines. But the balsam firs were sweet, and I heard the hermit thrush before I hurried out of the shadowed woods to the warmth of my blazing birch logs. I missed your singing. Yolande.

Sing for me now, the song that Richard wrote for you.

The light fades slowly, and as from a great distance,
a rippling song is heard. Howard bows his head to
listen. As the song dies faintly away, he springs to
his feet.

You're tired! What a brute I am! I've kept you standing unmercifully long. You must rest. I can finish the portrait now, before Richard comes home. It was the sunlight and the song that were missing. I have your eyes now.

In his enthusiasm for the picture, he keeps working at it here and there as he talks.

I'll give you a cup of tea, and then I'll take you home. Just a minute till I catch that shadow, Yolande. I've painted you, singing. Richard will hear his song, when he sees the portrait. Now!

In the deepening dusk, Yolande moves softly and stowly from the pedestal and goes out of the door

in a flutter of white and green draperies.

Wait, Yolande! It's snowing. You must let me wrap you up.

Howard goes to the couch for coats, or rugs, as Yolande goes out at the door. He follows, but there is only emptiness. He calls.

Yolande! Yolande!

He returns, dazed, to the room, dropping the rugs on the couch. He goes to the easel and examines the portrait.

Fool that I am! I let her come and go without a word. How pale she was! And her hands were transparent. I did not paint her hands.

He works feverishly on the hands.

Why did they bring her back from the South so soon?

He lays down his brushes.

Richard. Richard is coming home. I had forgotten Richard. She came to meet him.

He picks up the brushes slowly, and works lovingly and painstakingly on the portrait.

Richard shall have the portrait, although he has Yolande.

It is almost dark. Howard sits broading in front of the easel, brushes idle. Stumbling feet are heard on the stairs, and Richard Rafe bursts into the room, not a happy boyish Richard, but wan, dishevelled, all the brilliant youth of him crushed. He stands for a moment in the doorway, swaying, then plunges headlong to the couch, and is shaken with sobs, the dry, racking sobs of a man whose grief is naked and unashamed.

Howard has risen and stands with his back to the easel, concealing the portrait. There is a long si-

lence. Howard looks at the boy in impatient disgust. As the boy lifts piteous eyes to his, he turns away from the easel to the window that he may not be a spectator of Richard's sodden woe. As he moves, the half light from the window falls full upon the portrait of Yolande, Yolande of the love-lit eyes, with clasped hands, waiting, listening. With one bound the boy is across the room, half-kneeling before the easel.

RICHARD. Yolande! Yolande! Oh, Yolande, I can't bear it.

HOWARD (sharply). Quit blubbering, you sodden wretch. It isn't decent.

RICHARD (brokenly). She looked like that in Rome.

HOWARD. She looks like that now.

RICHARD. Now?

The boy's face quivers. Howard looks at him angrily and speaks roughly.

HOWARD. She's waiting for you. You can't go to her like this.

RICHARD. Go to her?

He turns to the portrait.

Yolande! Yolande! I'll come to you. Wait for me.

He turns to Howard.

You saw her look like that, Tolles (beseechingly). You understand. I can't live without her. It's un-

thinkable. I must go to her.

Howard takes him by the shoulders, and roughly shakes him into some semblance of manhood.

HOWARD (fiercely, with a wild fear). Where is she?

RICHARD (gently, his voice softened by the knowledge that none who know her, but must share his grief).

Didn't you know? Her sister's letter met me at the dock. She died two weeks ago on the Isle of Pines. They buried her there. They wrote me that she was growing weaker, and I was hurrying to her. The other letters missed me. Tolles, I can't bear it. I must go to her.

His momentary control leaves him. His slight frame shakes with torturing sobs. Howard stands rigid, his eyes upon the portrait of Yolande. After a moment he turns his eyes to the model's stand and follows the path from the stand to the door.

HOWARD (in a steady voice, without emotion). She died two weeks ago on the Isle of Pines. They buried her there.

RICHARD. (oblivious to everything but the memory of Yolande). She is so beautiful. The sunlight on her hair, her lovely hair.

He touches the canvas with caressing fingers, and in bewilderment discovers the paint is still wet.

(to Howard, hoursely). You did this today, from memory, for me?

HOWARD. (still in a daze). To-day—for you—but not from memory, Dick.

He catches at the boyhood name for comfort. Dick's eyes question him.

I do not know. She came today. She said—I thought she said—(hesitates). She came to my studio today. She lifted her lovely eyes and spoke your name. She came even though they buried her two weeks ago on the Isle of Pines.

RICHARD. She came to you?

HOWARD. For you, Dick. She came for your sake.

RICHARD. Tell me.

HOWARD. How do I know? She said she would come. When the autumn chill sent her family hurrying South with her, she said, "I'll come back before Richard comes home. We'll finish the portrait for him in your studio." She said it to me with her dear hand in mine at the edge of the woods. "Richard will need the portrait" she said. And to-day—

RICHARD. Today?

HOWARD. I finished the portrait today, here in my studio. The snow is falling outside, but there was sunlight on her hair, and the soft breeze was blowing her white and green draperies—

RICHARD. The breeze?

HOWARD (recovering himself). Dick, I swear—I felt the wind blowing through the pines. I smelt the fresh new balsam needles. I heard—I heard—Dick—she sang—she sang your song.

RICHARD. She sang my song?

HOWARD. Here—to-day—in my studio. I heard your song—the song you wrote for her—the song she sang for me in the woods.

RICHARD. Oh, Tolles, Tolles! I cannot live without her. I will not live without her.

HOWARD. What cause for grief have you? She loved you.

RICHARD. We loved each other through all those golden days in Rome. Tell me about the summer. You were together.

HOWARD. Yes, we were together.

RICHARD. You saw how lovely she was—how sweet
—how dear—

HOWARD. (slowly). Yes, I saw how lovely she was-how-

I saw how she loved you, Dick.

- RICHARD. Yolande! Yolande! The wonder of it.

  That she should love me. Tolles, I can't believe it. Tell
  me it's true. What did she say? How did she look?
- HOWARD. She looked like that (pointing to the canvas). She stood in the woodland path and held out her hands to me. "You are Tolles Howard," she said. "Richard told me I should find you here. I am Yolande Therrett." She said it proudly, Dick, with the pride of a woman who knows herself beloved.

## RICHARD. Beloved! Beloved!

- HOWARD. We talked of you, Dick, always of you, my friend and Yolande's lover. She was so proud of you. She loved you, Dick. She wanted you. But she could wait. "He will not come home till 'The Forest Symphony' is finished," she said. "It is a great work, Dick's masterpiece. He must not come till it is finished."
- RICHARD. I was coming home to claim her, Tolles, to open the old house and take her there as my bride. And she died two weeks ago. I can't bear it.
- HOWARD. She asked me to paint the portrait for you, Richard, for your home-coming. "I will think of Richard while you paint," she said. I painted her love-laden eyes, the dear head, lifted, listening for the sound of your voice, the hands that would unclasp at your touch. And then she went away, her last word to me, "Richard will need the portrait." She said it when we parted at the edge of the woods—and today the shy, sweet soul of her braved unknown terrors for the portrait's sake. "It must be ready for Richard when he comes." It is ready. I finished it today while her lovely voice sang your song, her patient eyes watched for your coming, her clasped hands waited for your touch. God! How sweet she was!

RICHARD. She promised to come to me when the "Forest Symphony" was finished.

HOWARD. She told me that she wanted to live in the old house, the house where you had been a little boy. There was never anyone but you, Dick.

RICHARD. She knew what a friend you've been to me, Tolles. I talked about you so much in Rome.

HOWARD. I was someone to whom she could talk about you, Dick, someone who loved you, too. There can be only happy memories for you. It was for you she found her uncharted way through the wind-swept spaces from the Isle of Pines, for you she waits. You cannot go to her marred. She will wait till you come to her with the marks of a good fight upon you. Go back to Rome and to work. Yolande believes in you. She is listening for the "Forest Symphony" to justify her pride in you. It is not a coward whom Yolande loves.

Richard sits for a moment with his head in his hands, Howard watching him. Dick rises, stands before the portrait, turning it to the light.

## RICHARD. Yolande!

The two men who love Yolande and each other grip hard. There is no need for speech. Richard goes out manfully. Howard turns to face the bitter loneliness of his hearth. He, too, looks to the portrait for comfort. As he turns it once more away from the window, there is an almost imperceptible flutter of green and white drapery, a misty, ethereal light, and the unmistakable odor of balsam, pungent, sleep-inviting. But on the canvas only a blurred and faded outline of New Hampshire woods.

CURTAIN

#### NOTE

The "Portrait of Yolande" depends for its effect very largely on the lighting. The appearance and disappearance of Yolande must be managed with infinite care. The two men who love Yolande must be more in key with her than with each other. While they talk together, their thoughts are with Yolande.

# JETHRO A Play in One Act

#### NOTE

The following advertisement is a bona fide one; it appeared in the Cincinnati Times Star.

WANTED:—AN OLD MAN; one who wants to live in the country on a small place by himself. The pay is small, forty dollars a month and board himself. The place can hardly be called a good one, because, besides living alone, he would have to cook his own meals and do such work as called on to do.

The one for this place should be a man used to hard work, but who wanted a steady place, rain or shine, if he gives satisfaction. Don't care how old he is, if he is in good health, and does not drink a drop of liquor, and who would not be bothered with relatives and friends calling on him. It is not an attractive berth, and would be too lonesome for most men. Don't bother me with answering this advertisement, unless you want the place with all its disadvantages. It's even worse than I say it is.

# **JETHRO**

A Tragedy in One Act.

#### CHARACTERS.

Horace Dunbar Lemuel, a half grown neighbor's-boy Jethro Morton Nathaniel, his grandson

### TIME.

A late afternoon in early winter.

#### PLACE.

The kitchen of a low-lying, lonely farm house, the summer plaything of Horace Dunbar.

#### SCENE.

In the center of the Back Wall, there is a door, opening on a porch, below which the driveway turns.

To the Left of this door, another door leads to a bedroom, the interior of which is partly visible. The lower steps of a stairway are in the kitchen, at the Right.

At the side of the steps a door leads to a passage and exit.

A stove is to the Right of the back door, a table near the center of the room, a mantel shelf in the Left Wall.

There are chairs, a cupboard, a rag rug, and simple furnishings. The kitchen is cold, and has an unlivedin look.

As the play begins, Horace Dunbar is seated at the table, busy with papers which he is sorting, throwing some into the wood box, folding others into a small satchel. Lemuel in short coat and muffler, with his cap awkwardly in his hand, is standing by the kitchen door.

DUNBAR. I'm paying you a darn sight more than you're worth now, Lemuel, but if it's money you want—

LEMUEL. No, sir, it ain't the wages. I can't do it no longer nohow. Pap's needin' me. And I ain't goin' to tromp through the snow to feed them animiles no more. It's spooky comin' through them woods.

DUNBAR. Scared, are you, Lem?

LEMUEL. Ain't nuther. (starts) What's that?

DUNBAR. A hungry mouse, perhaps. It is a lonely hole in the winter.

He rises, having finished the papers, walks about the room, looks out of the window.

I hate to give it up, but there's no help for it. I'll have to sell the place. Marion will be sorry, but—

LEMUEL. The neighbors sure will miss seeing Mis' Dunbar's clothes. Maw and the girls have been copying them, but they don't look like Mis' Dunbar's somehow.

DUNBAR (smiling). Yes my wife does like pretty things. If she hadn't had to go to her mother in such a hurry, she would never have left so much of her folderol-dery here. You'll have to get those two trunks to the express office to-morrow morning, Lemuel. The address is on them.

Lemuel goes over and examines the trunks, spelling out the address. He picks up suit case and bag to put on top.

No, not the bags, Lem. I'll take those in with me. Won't trust them to the express. Put them over there with my things and don't let me forget them.

# Lemuel moves the bags.

- LEMUEL. Is there anything else, Mr. Dunbar?
- DUNBAR. No, Lemuel. I think we've arranged everything. Your father will take the horses. I've packed our personal possessions. I'll have the house boarded up. Mrs. Dunbar will be disappointed. She had planned a big Thanksgiving house party. But there's no use. I can't get anyone to look after the place.
- LEMUEL. Seems somebody ought to be glad to git such a nice comfortable home for the winter. If you put a piece in the paper?
- DUNBAR. Advertise? I have advertised.

He hands newspaper to Lemuel, who reads advertisement stumblingly, with chuckles and grinning comment, while Dunbar smokes.

If that doesn't fetch them, Lem, do you think anything will?

- LEMUEL (reading). "Wanted:—An old man, one who wants to live in the country, by himself." Gee, Mr. Dunbar, do you think there's anybody old enough to want to do that?
- DUNBAR. Doesn't seem so, Lem. That ad. is three days old, and never an applicant.
- LEMUEL (reading). "The pay is small, forty dollars a month and find himself." What's that mean, Mr. Dunbar?
- DUNBAR. "Find himself?" Board himself, Lemuel.
- LEMUEL. Why don't you say so then, instead of that fancy way of telling him he has to git his own fodder? (Reading). "The place can hardly be called a good one." Sure, Mr. Dunbar, it ain't a bad place. You've always been good to the help.
- DUNBAR. Wish some help would come along to hear your recommendation, Lemuel.

LEMUEL (reading)."Besides living alone, he would have to cook his own meals, and do such work as called on to do. The one for the place should be a man used to hard work—"

DUNBAR. "Hard work!" Nobody knows the meaning of the word nowadays. The new conjugation runs,

"I don't want to work,
You don't want to work
He, she and it don't want to work.
They don't want to work."

LEMUEL (reading). "But who wanted a steady place, rain or shine, if he gives satisfaction. Don't care how old he is, if he is in good health, and does not drink a drop of liquor." Lord, Mr. Dunbar, where'd he get it? "And who wouldn't be bothered with relatives and friends calling on him." No danger, Mr. Dunbar. There wasn't a human traveled this road for three weeks last winter.

"It is not an attractive berth, and would be too lone-some for most men. Don't bother me with answering this advertisement, unless you want the place with all its disadvantages. It is even worse than I say it is." Sure Mike it is, Mr. Dunbar. It's the tarnalest, Godforsakenest place in this neck of creation. It's been empty ever since,—we'll, ever since you know what, happened here. Nobody but rich city folks would ever have bought it. You ain't never going to get no old man to stay out here by hisself all winter.

DUNBAR. Evidently not, Lemuel.

LEMUEL. (starting). What's that?

A stumbling step is heard on the porch. Lemuel shrinks back into the shadow. Mr. Dunbar opens the door. Jethro Morton stands in the doorway, old, weary, frightened, a lumpy carpet bag in his hand, a

folded newspaper under his arm. The late afternoon sunlight shines on his white hair, as he removes his uncomfortable looking Sunday hat.

JETHRO. Am I too late, sir?

He steps eagerly inside, as he sees Lemuel in the shadow.

The place isn't gone, sir?

DUNBAR. Come in, man, come in, and shut the door.
You look gone yourself. You didn't walk from the station?

Jethro comes forward, removing his hat not awkwardly, but as if it were an effort. He still stands.

JETHRO. The place, sir, for an old man. I couldn't come any sooner. The advertisement, sir. It says an old man.

He looks at Lemuel fearfully.

DUNBAR. You didn't come to work, man?

JETHRO. Yes, sir. It says "used to hard work." I've never been used to anything else.

DUNBAR. You're the last of your race, then. Nobody wants to work, now. I've given up. I'm going to sell the place.

JETHRO (panic-stricken). Oh, I wouldn't do that, sir. I'm used to hard work.

DUNBAR. You look it. But you don't look as if you could stand much more of it.

JETHRO. Oh, I'm strong, sir, I'm very strong.

He straightens himself, and almost falls.

DUNBAR. Here, sit down.

He helps the old man to a chair.

Lemuel, the man's faint. It's food he needs.

Lemuel brings coffee from the back of the stove, and bread and butter from the cupboard.

JETHRO. Thank you, sir. It was very early when I had my bite this morning.

He eats slowly, but hungrily, balancing his saucer on his knees, awkwardly.

LEMUEL (awe-stricken). Jiminy, ain't you et nothing since breakfast?

JETHRO. (as he sips his coffee) It took me a long time to find the place, sir. My grandson, Nathaniel, has a position in the city. I thought he'd take me to the office where the advertisement said to find you, but he'd left his boarding house. The city was very noisy and crowded, but a policeman helped me to find the number. The boy said you wouldn't be back today, sir. I went to the wrong station at first, but people were kind. The conductor pointed out the road to me, when I got off the train here.

DUNBAR. Heavens, man, you walked from the station, and carried that bag? It's three miles.

JETHRO. Yes, sir. I'm really very strong, sir. It was only the city that made me look tired. I'm not afraid of work.

DUNBAR. Couldn't you have waited until morning?

JETHRO. No, sir, I had to come to-night. I couldn't find Nathaniel. I went back to his lodging house.

DUNBAR. Has he moved without leaving an address? JETHRO. Oh, no, sir. The landlady said she had his trunk all right, and that he'd be back to pay—he'd come back when he needed a clean shirt.

DUNBAR. Oh!

JETHRO. So I asked her to tell him where I am, sir,

and that I'd come to him on Saturday, and bring the mon—and bring him what he asked for.

I'll go to his place of business. It was closed when I went there today. The landlady wasn't very pleasant. I mistrust the poor lad doesn't get the right kind of vittles.

I may have a half holiday on Saturday, sir?

DUNBAR. But my dear man, I haven't engaged you yet?

JETHRO. No, sir, but you will, sir?

DUNBAR. I'm off for the West to-morrow. Lemuel, you'd better go hitch up. (Lemuel goes out). I have to get back to the city to-night. I'll take you in with me. You can come to see me at my office in the morning.

JETHRO. I've got to stay, sir. You see, I've sold my home, and Nathaniel being away—where would I stay to-night?

DUNBAR. And you expect me to leave you on the place—a homeless tramp from nowhere?

JETHRO (with simple dignity). I wouldn't say that, sir. I've never been a tramp. I've always worked hard, all my life. And I have—I did have a tidy little house on Hackberry St., in Oldtown.

DUNBAR. Why did you sell your house?

JETHRO. My grandson's gone to the city, and I was alone. Nathaniel's a smart lad.

DUNBAR. And smart lads need money, eh?

JETHRO. Yes, sir, for schooling and getting a start. Nathaniel's a fine lad, sir. He has a good position now.

DUNBAR. And he sends you money, I suppose?

JETHRO. Not yet, but he will, sir. He's promised to soon. Nathaniel's only a lad. (proudly) He's just had a raise.

- Lemuel puts his head in at the door.
- LEMUEL. It'll be slow goin' to-night, Mr. Dunbar. The rud's a sight.
- DUNBAR. In a minute, Lemuel. (hesitatingly) You look as if you'd treat the animals well.
- JETHRO. Then I'm to stay, sir?
- DUNBAR (grimly). None of them ever has. I'm a fool to try it again, but I hate to let the place go. Lemuel has been coming over to do the chores, but he's quitting because it's too lonely. There isn't another soul on the place, and won't be until spring.
- JETHRO. (now at peace, and tolerant of Lemuel.) He's young, sir, and the lads and lasses must frolic. They have no memories to keep them company.
- DUNBAR. I'm taking a risk, but you look as if you could be trusted with the bank of England. If I engage you, can I be sure you'll stay till spring?
- JETHRO. (simply) I never broke my word, sir, and I've sold my house.
- LEMUEL. (who has been fidgeting at the door). You'll miss your train, Mr. Dunbar.
- DUNBAR. Coming, Lemuel. Take out my bags, while I show—Great Scott, I don't even know the man's name.
- JETHRO. Jethro Morton, sir.
- DUNBAR. Well, Jethro, you understand about terms. The money will be sent to you every month. I won't be out again. Lemuel can come over for a few days to show you about things. You're sure you won't find it too lonely and quit?
- JETHRO. No, sir. I like the quiet with the dumb animals about.
- DUNBAR. You'll find provisions for a few days. I'll send out some things from the city to start you. Get

what else you need in the village. You can sleep in this room—(opening door into bedroom) or you can have an up-stairs room if you prefer it.

He leads the way up-stairs, Jethro slowly following. Mr. Dunbar's voice continues in instructions. In the meantime, Lemuel picks up the bags and starts for the door. A commotion is heard outside. Lemuel drops the bags, just beside the door, where they will be hidden when the door is opened, and runs out, shouting.

LEMUEL (as he goes). Whoa, there, whoa! I knew them fool horses wouldn't stand when they were headed for the barn. (outside) Whoa there! Steady, there Cubullin!

Mr. Dunbar and Jethro descend the stairs.

JETHRO. Thank you, sir, it's very grand up-stairs, but I think if it's all the same, I'll sleep in the kitchen chamber. It will be friendlier, sir, near the fire. I may go to the city on Saturday, sir?

DUNBAR. I suppose so, Jethro. Are you sure I can count on finding you here in the spring?

JETHRO. Yes sir, everything will be safe with me, sir.

LEMUEL (shouting, from outside). Mr. Dunbar, the up train's whistled. You'll have to drive some to catch the down train.

DUNBAR. Good-bye, Jethro. I never did such a fool trick in my life, but—

He goes out, looking back hesitatingly, but apparently satisfied with the old man's simplicity and integrity.

Jethro stands in the doorway, until the horses are heard starting off, to Lemuel's rapid fire of orders. He comes in slowly, closes the door, sees the bags. His slow wits make him hesitate. Then he picks up the bags, opens the door, and calls into the darkness.

JETHRO. Mr. Dunbar! Mr. Dunbar!

The noise of the horses' hoofs dies away, but there is no answer.

That's a heedless lad.

He slowly closes the door again, carries the bags to the bedroom off the kitchen. He comes back, having taken off his shoes, sitting on the bed which is visible from the kitchen. He removes his coat and vest, and hangs them up. He opens the carpet bag, takes out his slippers and jersey coat and puts them on; he moves slowly and clumsily. He puts a stick of wood on the fire which is almost out; pumps the tea kettle full of water at the sink, and places it on the stove; brings bread, bacon and eggs from the pantry; hums softly in a quavering voice; draws the curtains and lights the lamp.

Footsteps are heard on the porch, followed by a vigorous pounding on the door. Before Jethro can reach it, Nathaniel bursts in, a dapper, weak looking youth. Jethro is speechless for a moment, then bursts into joyful but tremulous speech.

JETHRO. Nathaniel! My boy!

NATHANIEL (coolly). Hello, Grandad!

JETHRO. Nathaniel! Is it really you?

NATHANIEL. It's me all right, half froze.

JETHRO. There, there, poor lad, come up to the fire.

My! how you've growed!

NATHANIEL. Gee whiz, Grandad, I've been chasing you around the country since noon.

JETHRO. I'm sorry, lad. Oh, but it's good to see you! It's a long time since I've seen my boy.

- NATHANIEL. It would have been longer if I'd known what I was getting into.
- JETHRO. Did the landlady tell you I'd been to see you?
- NATHANIEL. Uh-uh. Had the dickens of a time finding the place. It's dark as Egypt. Nearly got run down in the lane by a country bumpkin driving like mad. City streets are safety zones compared with this hell of a landscape.
- JETHRO. Nathaniel, Nathaniel. There, there, laddie, don't swear.
- NATHANIEL. In the name of Heck, I thought you were buried alive in Oldtown, but whew—this place ain't even on the map. Where'd you ever hear of it?
- JETHRO. In the newspaper, Nathaniel. The city newspaper I've been subscribing to ever since you went away. I've been watching for your name, laddie.
- NATHANIEL. You'll see it some day, Grandad. I'm down on my luck just now, but I'll strike it rich soon. A fellow's got to have capital nowadays.
- JETHRO. Yes, laddie, Grandfather knows. I've done the best I could for you.
- NATHANIEL. Have you got the money, Grandad? I've got to have it.
- JETHRO. Yes, laddie, Grandfather's got it for you. It's a lot of money, Nathaniel. Is it that you're starting in business for yourself. I'd be proud to see your name over your own shop.
- NATHANIEL. Oh, store-keeping is too slow, Grandad. I'm not going into trade.
- JETHRO. It's honest, Nathaniel? (with sudden suspicion) You haven't been borrowing, Nathaniel? I've been poor, but I've always kept out of debt.
- NATHANIEL. Oh, Grandad, you're hopelessly old-fash-

- ioned. Times have changed. The big men do all their business on credit. The bigger borrower you are, the more capital they think you've got.
- JETHRO. I know it's hard on a young lad, seeing all the pleasures of the world, and not having money to enjoy himself. But keep out of debt, laddie. Keep out of debt. It's a mill stone about your neck. Tell Grandfather the truth, laddie. Have you porrowed money?
- NATHANIEL. Yes—I-I- borrowed. It wasn't much, Grandad. Only three hundred.
- JETHRO. It took me ten years to save it, my boy. Was it your employer that lent it to you?
- NATHANIEL (hesitatingly). Yes I got it from my employer.
- JETHRO. That was kind of him, Nathaniel.

Nathaniel looks at his grandfather, but there is no sign of suspicion in the old man's face.

Grandfather is glad he can give you the money to pay it back. But promise me you won't borrow again, laddie.

NATHANIEI. All right, if I get out of this safe, I'll run straight.

It's too damned uncomfortable.

- JETHRO. Then we won't say anything more about it. You're hungry, laddie.
- NATHANIEL. You bet I am. Got anything to eat, Grandad?
- JETHRO. I'll cook you some bacon and eggs and batter cakes. You used to like grandfather's batter cakes.
- NATHANIEL. They call them flannel cakes in town.

  And that's what they taste like. Good old ham and eggs
  and buckwheats sound good to me.

During the following conversation, Jethro putteringly but competently prepares the meal according to menu. The appetizing odor of frying bacon fills the room.

- JETHRO (poising a piece of bacon on the fork). But the advertisement said, "No relatives to come visiting!" Perhaps I oughtn't—
- NATHANIEL. Don't be a crab, Grandad. I'll be off in the morning. I won't damage the old man's property. Let's have a look around. Horace Dunbar has money enough to fix this old shack up.

He picks up the lamp, and opens cupboards, pulls out drawers, etc., while Jethro flutters about in distress, dividing his attention between his cooking and Nathaniel's movements, protesting.

JETHRO. Don't meddle, Nat, don't meddle.

Jethro continues to reprove him and insists on his letting things alone, but without success. Nathaniel goes into the bedroom.

- NATHANIEL. Is this where you are going to bunk, Grandad?
- JETHRO. Yes, Nathaniel.

Nathaniel appears in the doorway with Dunbar's bags.

- NATHANIEL. Some foxy bags, Grandad. Where did you make the raise?
- JETHRO. They're the master's. He forgot them. Put them back, Nathaniel. Put them back,

Nathaniel pays no attention, but brings the bags into the room. Icthro tries to rescue them, and as Nathaniel opens the smaller bag, he carefully replaces the things Nathaniel has taken from the larger bag. Jethro's distress is great but ineffective. NATHANIEL. I came in such a hurry I didn't have time to pack my boudoir cap. The old man's pajammies will be a snug fit.

He opens the suit case and takes out silver. The family plate, by jinks!

He opens the smaller bag and takes out a jewel case. Jehoshaphat! Ain't Horace the careless duffer! Me lady's jewels!

He slips a ring on his finger, hangs a necklace about his neck, admires himself in the little glass, parades back and forth, does a few dance steps. Jethro pleads and commands. The bacon burns. Nathaniel suddenly sobers, and speaks slowly as if warding off an idea.

# And me owin' my board bill!

He removes the jewelry, and puts down the bags, and sits at the table, to Jethro's immense relief. Jethro waits on him, eating very little himself.

- NATHANIEL (with an attempt at being jovial). How's Oldtown and the old shack? Anybody living in it?
- JETHRO. I've sold our home, Nathaniel. I meant to leave it to you,—
- NATHANIEL (touched for a minute). Sold your house, eh, Grandad? But you've always lived there.
- JETHRO. Yes, Nathaniel, I brought your Grandmother, Melissa there, from her father's hous. Ellen, your mother, was born in that house, and she came back there to die. You are ail I have, laddie. I hoped you'd stay on in the old home, but young people like the city. Your mother did......Felix Snelling has coveted my garden a long time. When your letter came, I went to him in his store. He was weighing butter.
- NATHANIEL. With his thumb in the boat as usual, eh, Grandad?

- JETHRO. The old house has always sheltered honest folks, Nathaniel. I do not like to think of Felix' wife in Melissa's room. But he gave me the money you had to have—for my little house. I wish I could give you more, Nathaniel. You were such a smart boy, and with the schooling, I couldn't save much.
- NATHANIEL (embarrassed). Grandad, I-you-I'll pay you back some day. I'm in an awful hole just now, but I'll pull out, and my luck will change. I'll buy you a house in the city. You won't have to work, Grandad.

As Nathaniel speaks, the money has been counted out from the old wallet into Nathaniel's bill fold.

- JETHRO. I'm used to work, Nathaniel. I'd be lonesome, being idle.
- NATHANIEL. Grandad, you—I—my father—you and I have such different tastes. I don't intend to work all my life as hard as you have. I want to get some pleasure out of living.
- JETHRO. There is pleasure, Nathaniel, in doing an honest day's work in an honest way.
- NATHANIEL. Wasn't my father a city man, Grandad? JETHRO. Yes, your father was—a city man.
- NATHANIEL. Tell me about him, Grandad. You never talk about him. It's always my mother.
- JETHRO. I never saw the—your father. It was dull for Ellen in Oldtown, after Melissa died. She coaxed me to let her go to work in the city. I could never refuse Ellen anything. She went away, smiling and happy, blowing kisses to me through her pretty fingers. Perhaps if Melissa had lived, Ellen would have stayed at home.....She came back in two years, a faded, dull woman, with you in her arms. When I asked about your father, she only said, "He's dead, now, and it doesn't

matter." She did not want to talk about him, and I did not question her. She died within the year.

There is a pause in which the old man thinks bitter thoughts, the young man romantic ones.

NATHANIEL. Was my father rich, Grandad?

JETHRO. Yes, he was rich.

NATHANIEL. Didn't he leave my mother anything? JETHRO. No, he was a spendthrift.

NATHANIEL. I must be like him, Grandad.

JETHRO. No, no! God forbid, Nathaniel. You are Ellen's son, and Melissa's watching over you, laddie. I'm a stupid old man, but I've tried my best. I've wrestled with the Lord in prayer for you, Nathaniel. But there was no woman in the house, just you and me, laddie, just you and me.

NATHANIEL. Grandad, you're a—you're a good man. I wish—but pshaw, it doesn't get you anywhere. (yawning to cover embarrassment) Where are you going to put me up for the night? I'm sleepy.

JETHRO (picking up the lamp). You're tired, laddie. You've had a hard day. I'm a talky old man. Come to bed. You shall sleep in grandfather's bed room. When you were a little shaver, you used to say you had better dreams in grandfather's bed.

NATHANIEL. All right, Grandad, I'll turn in. I must be off early in the morning.

Nathaniel goes into the bedroom, where he can be heard moving about. Jethro shakes down the stove and tidies the room, setting the chairs in place, then he goes to the door of the bedroom.

JETHRO. Are you all comfy, Nat, lad?

NATHANIEL. All comfy, Grandad. Good-night, grandad.

JETHRO. Good-night and pleasant dreams, Nathaniel.

Jethro comes down to the rocking chair, takes a folding daguerreotype of Melissa and Ellen from his pocket, looks at it long and lovingly before he puts it on the mantel.

The lad has Ellen's pretty mouth, but his eyes aren't Ellen's blue ones. His father—I'm glad his father's dead.

He puts out the lamp, lights a candle, picks up Mr. Dunbar's bags, hesitates about what to do with them, finally sets them down uncertainly in different parts of the room; he takes a look at the fire, moves the teakettle back, looks around the room, locks the door, and goes slowly up the stairs.

The curtain is lowered to denote a lapse of time.

Stealthy sounds are heard in the darkness. Nathaniel enters from the kitchen chamber, fumbles for matches, lights lamp, searches for bags, stumbles; finds largest bag; opens the door and puts it outside. As he finds the smaller one, Jethro is heard descending the stairs. Nathaniel blows out the lamp, and tries to make the door. But Jethro, candle in hand is between him and the door.

Jethro looks in bedroom, sees empty bed, and calls.

# JETHRO. Nathaniel!

There is no answer. In increasing alarm, he calls again.

# Nathaniel!

Nathaniel tries to slink out at the door, but Jethro turns, and the candle light falls on him.

Nathaniel! Are you sick, laddie?

Nathaniel tries to hide the jewel box, but Jethro sees it and totters.

JETHRO (with a note of terror). Nathaniel! No-no! (with a sudden burst of anger). Give it to me!

NATHANIEL. Get out of my way! Let me go!

Nathaniel has tried forcibly to push past the old man, but with his back against the door, Jethro sets down the candle, and wrests the box from him. In the struggle the contents are scattered on the floor. Jethro, holding the empty box, commands.

JETHRO. Pick them up, you—you thief!

Nathaniel hesitates, but the blind rage of the old man dominates the situation. Nathaniel sullenly scrambles for the trinkets and replaces them in the box in Jethro's extended hand.

Jethro speaks quietly, having recovered himself.

Now go! The bad blood of your father is stronger than all my prayers.

NATHANIEL. My father? What do you mean?

JETHRO. Your father was a black-hearted scoundrel.

NATHANIEL. You said he was a gentleman and rich.

JETHRO (scornfully). Ay, that he was. A gentleman and rich. But he left you nothing, not even a name. Go find your father's people, but never let me see your face again.

Horses' hoofs are heard outside. Jethro and Nathaniel stand paralyzed.

JETHRO. Oh, my God! The master's coming!

His anger falls from him. Only terror and the protecting tenderness for Ellen's baby are in his voice.

Run, laddie, run! Come, Grandad will help you.

He pushes the abject lad through the passage way and out another door into the dark.

He runs for Nathaniel's betraying cap and coat and throws them after him.

Run, laddie, run! Oh, God, Ellen's son!

With the last remnant of his strength he totters to the table. His head falls upon his outflung arms. He moans

#### Ellen's son! A thief! Melissa!

Voices are heard. Exclamations, as Lemuel stumbles over a bag on the porch. Dunbar and Lemuel enter, Lemuel carrying bag.

DUNBAR (entering, looks about excitedly). How did this bag get out on the porch?

JETHRO. I don't know, sir.

DUNBAR. Don't know?

He sees the box still in Jethro's hand.

Thank goodness, my wife's jewels are safe. Where's the thief?

Lemuel drops the bag in fright.

You didn't let him get away?

No answer, only a half dazed mean from Jethro. Dunbar still looks at him excitedly, as if the thief might be concealed about Jethro's person.

How did you stop him?

As Jethro does not answer, he goes to him in sudden pity.

Are you hurt, man?

JETHRO (tottering to his feet). No, sir, I'm all right, sir.

DUNBAR. You didn't see anyone in the lane, did you, Lem?

- LEMUEL. Might o' run him down in that Egypt, and the horses would o' thought it was the ruts.
- DUNBAR (to Jethro). When did it happen? Was there more than one of them? Speak, man. He can't have gone far. Perhaps we can catch him yet.
- JETHRO (aroused). Oh, no, sir, I wouldn't try, sir.
- DUNBAR (a little suspiciously). What's the matter with you? Are you—Great Scott! You don't mean—Are you protecting someone?

JETHRO (with an effort). No, sir.

DUNBAR. There's been no one here?

JETHRO (unused to lying). No, sir.

DUNBAR (with an ironic laugh). Well, I'll be—
"Used to hard work," "wanted a steady place," "sold
his tidy house." It was a put-up job. You came out here
to steal.

JETHRO. Oh, no, sir.

He sees the hopelessness of further denial.

- DUNBAR. And I thought you were only a stupid old man. I'll be picking up gold bricks in the streets next. At my age!
- LEMUEL. Who'd a thunk an old man like that was a thief! Can you beat that? He almost got away with it, too.

JETHRO. Thief?

He looks at Lemuel threateningly, but sees no answer, and sinks back.

- DUNBAR. I took a chance on you because I thought you were stupid enough to be honest. You're stupid all right. I'd have been fool enough to believe any cock and bull story you'd have had sense enough to make up.
- JETHRO. I haven't stolen anything, sir. It's all here safe.

DUNBAR. Don't be a hypocrite.

LEMUEL (gloating). You caught him with the goods on him, didn't you, Mr. Dunbar?

DUNBAR. To think I was almost fool enough not to come back for this stuff, and miss my train. I thought it would be safe with you at least over night. Bah! I might have known there wasn't such a thing as an honest man who wants to work.

LEMUEL (who reads dime novels). I bet that beard is a disguise.

He tweaks the old man's beard.

At this last indignity, Jethro starts forward.

JETHRO. Mr. Dunbar!

DUNBAR. Don't talk!

Jethro, badgered, subsides.

You're too old to prosecute, but get out.

Jethro starts for the door.

Get your things and go. There's nothing else left for you to steal.

Jethro winces impotently. Then, slowly gets hat and coat from the pey, lifts daguerreotype from the mantel, puts it lovingly in his pocket. He picks up the carpet bag, and goes slowly to the door. Dunbar and Lemuel stand aside. At the door, Jethro turns.

JETHRO. The paper, sir. I shall need it to find work.

He returns to pick up the paper, and with it under his

He returns to pick up the paper, and with it under h arm, goes blindly out into the night.

Lemuel looks virtuous, but Dunbar is disturbed by doubts.

CURTAIN















